

NAHUM

INTRODUCTION

1. Title. The title of the book consists simply of the name of the prophet who was its author. Nahum, Heb. *Nachum*, means “comforted,” or “the one comforted.” The name occurs only here in the Old Testament, although it is related to the names Nehemiah, “Yahweh has comforted,” and Menahem, “comforter.”

2. Authorship. There is no information concerning Nahum other than that found in his prophecy. He was an “Elkoshite,” that is, a native of Elkosh (see on ch. 1:1).

3. Historical Setting. An indication of the time of Nahum’s prophetic ministry is found in the reference to the fall of No (ch. 3:8). This city (known by the Greeks as Thebes, later as Diospolis) was destroyed by Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria, in 663 B.C. Thus at least a portion of Nahum’s ministry must have been after that time. The prophet views the fall of Nineveh as still future (ch. 3:7), and thus a reasonable date for Nahum could be around 640 B.C. Since this prophecy, which tells of Assyria’s end, was written when that nation was apparently in the fullness of its power and prosperity, the book of Nahum strikingly verifies scriptural prophecy and attests the divine inspiration of the prophets. In Ashurbanipal’s reign most of the nations of the Fertile Crescent were either subjugated by Assyrian arms or paid tribute to Assyria. However, before he died the picture began to change, and after his death (about 627?) the Assyrian Empire soon disintegrated. Finally, after a siege of three months, Nineveh itself was captured in 612 B.C. by the Medes and the Babylonians (see Vol. II, p. 67). For a description of the city of Nineveh see Additional Note on Jonah 1. See also map p. 1002.

4. Theme. The book has one supreme theme, the coming fate of Nineveh. Because of this the prophecy is complementary to the message of Jonah. Jonah preached repentance to Nineveh, and because its inhabitants humbled themselves before God, the city was saved. However, Assyria again lapsed into iniquity, and it was Nahum’s burden to predict the divine sentence of its destruction. Nineveh’s measure of pride, cruelty, and idolatry had come to the full. Far too long had the kings of Assyria defied the God of heaven and His sovereignty, placing the Creator of the universe on a par with the idols of surrounding nations (see 2 Kings 18:33–35; 19:8–22), for these kings supposedly were carrying out the wishes of their god Ashur when they fought against other nations (see Vol. II, pp. 54, 55). Assyria’s defiance of God must cease, if not by the nation’s repentance, then by its destruction. The downfall of the Assyrian forces in Judah had been previously foretold by Isaiah (Isa. 37:21–38), but Nahum’s prediction foresaw the final downfall of the capital of the empire itself.

5. Outline.

- I. The Divine Purpose to Punish Nineveh, 1:1–15.
 - A. The superscription, 1:1.
 - B. The power of God to punish the wicked, 1:2–8.
 - C. The certainty of the coming punishment, 1:9–15.
- II. A Description of Nineveh’s Coming Destruction, 2:1–13.
 - A. The siege and capture of the city, 2:1–8.
 - B. The plundering of the city, 2:9–13.
- III. Nineveh’s Wickedness the Reason for Her Punishment, 3:1–7.
- IV. The Destruction of No an Example of Nineveh’s Destruction, 3:8–11.

V. The Finality and Completeness of Nineveh's Destruction, 3:12–19.

CHAPTER 1

The majesty of God in goodness to his people, and severity against his enemies.

1. Burden. Heb. *maṣṣa'*, “burden,” “hardship,” or “utterance” (see on Isa. 13:1).

Nineveh. Capital of Assyria. For a description of the city see Additional Note on Jonah 1; see Nineveh and Environs.

Elkoshite. A native of Elkosh, a place not certainly identified. A late and probably unreliable tradition identifies Elkosh with Alkush, a town in Assyria, and states that Nahum was born of parents in exile. More probable is the identification of Elkosh with Elkesi in Galilee. Some suggest that Nahum's connection with Galilee is shown by the name Capernaum, a name transliterated from the Hebrew, meaning “village of Nahum.”

Another tradition is that Elkosh lay near *Beith Jibrîn* in the lowland of Judah. Whether or not the prophet was born in Galilee, it is likely that he later lived in Judah and prophesied there.

Verses 1–10 are in the form of an acrostic poem. For a definition of such a device see Vol. III, p. 625. The first 15 letters of the alphabet seem to be employed, but with some irregularities.

2. Jealous. To illustrate the part God played in Nineveh's destruction His justice is set forth in vs. 2–6, and His power demonstrated by His control over the material world. The language employed should be understood in the light of the fact that God often adapts Himself to human language and experience (see Jer. 51:14; Amos 4:12; 6:8).

Take vengeance. God is not motivated by the vindictiveness that characterizes sinful man, but by a holy desire to uphold righteousness and to punish those who oppose it.

He reserveth. The LXX of this passage reads “and he cuts off his enemies.”

3. Slow to anger. See Ex. 34:6, 7. Divine mercy is proof, not of weakness, but of strength. Men may be “slow to anger” against iniquity because their moral callousness and insensibility make them so. For this they are to be pitied rather than admired. On the other hand, God delays manifesting His wrath against sin and sinners because He is “not willing that any should perish” (2 Peter 3:9). He grants time for repentance. Even when His offers of mercy are spurned He is loath to punish. “How shall I give thee up?” (Hosea 11:8) is the cry of His great heart of love. However, He cannot “acquit the wicked,” and those who persist in iniquity must reap the results.

Whirlwind. God's power is represented as displayed in the elements.

4. Rebuketh. A demonstration of the power of God, such as in the crossing of the Red Sea (see Ex. 14:21; Ps. 106:9).

Rivers. God is shown as in complete control of the elements of nature. Compare Ps. 107:33; Isa. 50:2.

Bashan. This region was noted for its rich pastures and large herds of cattle (see Deut. 32:14; Ps. 22:12; Eze. 39:18).

Carmel. A mountain range on the Mediterranean coast, well watered (see on 1 Kings 18:19).

Lebanon. Renowned for its cedars.

5. Mountains quake. The prophet here presents a most awe-inspiring picture of God's power.

All that dwell. Verses 3–6 describe God’s power and hence His ability to carry out the predicted destruction of Nineveh (see PK 364). The manifestation of God’s power here described will be seen in a much greater display at the time of the second coming of Christ (see PP 109).

6. Like fire. See Deut. 4:24; Jer. 7:20. In place of “his fury is poured out like fire,” the LXX reads “his wrath brings to nought kingdoms.”

Thrown down. Literally, “pulled down,” “torn down,” or “destroyed.”

7. Good. That God is “good” in character and action was best demonstrated by the One who was God incarnate (see John 10:11; Acts 10:38). While Nahum was a messenger of destruction to the Assyrians, he was a minister of comfort and consolation to his own people, assuring them that the Lord would be their “strong hold” in the “day of trouble” (see Ps. 61:2, 3).

8. Overrunning flood. This probably represents metaphorically the complete destruction to come to Nineveh through hostile invasion (see Isa. 8:7; cf. Dan. 11:26, 40). To all nations, modern as well as ancient, comes this same warning of punishment that will descend sooner or later upon those who exalt themselves against God (see PK 366). Nineveh’s period of probation was fast running out, and Nahum predicted a swiftly approaching destruction.

Place. Nineveh, evidently, in view of the context (see v. 1).

9. Imagine. Heb. *chashab*, “to reckon,” “regard,” “impute,” or “devise.” Here the prophet warns the Assyrians that their boasting against God is worse than useless (see Isa. 10:8–11; 36:18–20). Nahum heartens his people with the thought that what God promises He will fulfill.

Utter end. The repetition of this phrase (see v. 8) emphasizes the certainty of Nineveh’s downfall, for the punishment that God will bring upon the Assyrians will be so complete and permanent that never again, never a “second time,” will they be able to oppress God’s people. Although Nahum here specifically refers to the downfall of Assyria, his words may also be thought of as descriptive of the ultimate fate of all the wicked, of whom Assyria is a type. When they are finally destroyed from the earth in the last judgment, they will never live again; they will have no afterlife (see Ps. 37:6–11, 38; Mal. 4:1; 2 Peter 3:10–13; Rev. 20:12 to 21:5). Then it will be gloriously true that the “affliction” of sin will never again trouble God’s universe (see GC 504).

10. Thorns. See Num. 33:55; Joshua 23:13. Though the Assyrian army should form a front as impenetrable as a thorn hedge, God could easily overcome them (see Isa. 27:4).

Drunken. The experience of Assyria would parallel that of Babylon in some respects (see Dan. 5:1). In any case, there can be no doubt that the Assyrians were fond of feasting and drinking (see Diodorus ii. 26).

11. There is one. Addressing Nineveh, this probably refers to its king (see Isa. 36:4–10, 18–20).

A wicked counsellor. Literally, “a counselor of Belial.”

12. Quiet. Heb. *shalem*, “peaceful,” “intact,” or “complete.” The context here favors the meaning “intact,” or “complete,” rather than “peaceful,” or “quiet,” unless the thought be that the Assyrians are deceptively “quiet,” smug in their proud overconfidence.

Pass through. See Isa. 27:4.

13. His yoke. Evidently this refers to Judah’s being tributary to Assyria (see 2 Kings 18:13–16; 2 Chron. 33:11). Although Judah escaped the fate of Israel in the days of

Hezekiah, she retained what little liberty she had only by Assyria's sufferance, and her "bonds" of subjection to Assyria were broken "in sunder" only when that empire was destroyed.

14. Concerning thee. Here the prophet addresses Assyria and predicts its destruction.

Thy grave. That of Assyria (see Eze. 32:22, 23).

Vile. Rather, "light," or "of no account."

15. Good tidings. An exclamation of joy over the defeat of the enemy of God's people (see on Isa. 52:7). Nahum 1:15 is the first verse of ch. 2 in both the Hebrew and the Syriac.

Keep thy solemn feasts. With the reestablishment of peace it would once more be possible for the people of Judah to celebrate the great religious festivals (see on Ex. 23:14–17; Lev. 23:2; Deut. 16:16). The prophet Nahum pleads with his people to enter wholeheartedly into the spirit of these solemn occasions in order that God might bless and prosper the nation (see pp. 26–28).

Vows. In gratitude for their deliverance the Israelites are to redeem the vows they had made in times of trouble and danger.

Pass through. See v. 12.

Utterly cut off. See on v. 9.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

3 COL 177; CT 415; Ed 131; FE 356; GC 627; MH 435; PP 628; 8T 282

3–6PK 364; PP 109

7 1T 245

7, 8 PK 366

9 GC 504

CHAPTER 2

The fearful and victorious armies of God against Nineveh.

1. Dasheth. Again the prophet addresses the people of Assyria (see on ch. 1:14), warning them of their troublous future. The context makes evident (chs. 1:1; 2:1, 8; 3:1; etc.) that ch. 2 is descriptive of the fall of Nineveh.

Before thy face. When the attacking forces surround the city, its inhabitants will plainly see and sense their peril.

Keep the munition. Or, "guard the fortified place." In a slightly ironical tone the prophet admonishes the people of Nineveh to prepare for the final siege of the city, though such preparation would be in vain.

2. Hath turned away. Heb. *shub*, a word that may also mean "to bring again," "to turn again." The translation of the RSV reflects this latter sense. Both ideas seem to fit the context. The excellency of Jacob may be regarded as either having formerly been taken away by the Assyrians, or as now being restored through the destruction of the Assyrians.

Emptiers. The Assyrians have killed and plundered God's chosen people, and in turn will be killed and plundered by their conquerors.

3. Mighty men. Probably a reference to the besiegers of Nineveh.

Red. Possibly the shields were so colored, or their bronze or copper covering appeared red. It may be that the meaning is that the shields would become "red" with the blood of the slain.

Torches. Heb. *peladoth*, a word occurring in the OT only here, and of uncertain meaning. Some, from a comparison with the Arabic and the Persian, suggest the meaning “steel,” allowing the phrase to be translated “with fire of steel.” However, the derivation is doubtful. By a change in the Hebrew the RSV reads, “The chariots flash like flame.” The translation “torches” is obtained by a transposition of the first two consonants of *peladoth*. The conquering foe would not seek to take the city by stealth. The prophet graphically pictures a scene of flashing brilliance. The reference could be to the chariot ornaments, the weapons of the soldiers, the trappings of the horses, all of which would glitter in the sun and give the appearance of flashes of fire.

His preparation. The reference is probably to God, who is represented as gathering the host for battle (see Isa. 13:4; see on Isa. 13:6). Some think the reference is to the commander of the enemy forces.

Fir trees. Heb. *beroshim*, identified as the Phoenician juniper, similar to the cypress tree. A change of one letter in the consonantal Hebrew (see Vol. I, pp. 25, 26) gives the reading “riding horses,” “steeds,” “chargers” (RSV). This change is supported by the LXX, which here reads, “The horses shall be thrown into confusion.” The Heb. *ra’al*, “terribly shaken,” may be rendered “tremble.” The RSV translates the clause, “the chargers prance.”

4. Chariots. Heb. *rekeb*, two-wheeled vehicles of various types, drawn by horses. The chariot was almost exclusively used for military purposes (see on Ex. 14:9) and for state occasions (see on Gen. 41:43). Although there is archeological evidence that chariots were used to carry government officials on state missions, there is practically nothing to indicate that they were used for ordinary private transportation.

Rage. Literally, “act madly,” from a Hebrew root word meaning “to be moonstruck.”

One against another. The overwhelming force of the armies attacking Nineveh is here indicated. The vehicles of war would crowd “one against another.” The entire context of this chapter shows clearly that Nahum was depicting in graphic language the capture of Nineveh.

Torches. Heb. *lappidim*, the common word for torches or lamps (Gen. 15:17; Judges 7:16; etc.; see on Nahum 2:3).

5. His worthies. Literally, “his mighty ones.” Evidently the Assyrian king charges his army leaders to defend the city walls. In confused haste, or perhaps in a partially sober condition, they “stumble in their walk.”

Defence. Heb. *sokek*, meaning “a barricade.”

6. Gates. There is either a figurative reference to the assault of the enemy or a reference to the literal flooding of the city. However, the details are meager. Some hold that the prophecy met its fulfillment in the incident described by the Greek historian Diodorus (ii. 26, 27), who reports that Nineveh was captured because of an unusually great flood of the Euphrates (Tigris?), which destroyed part of the wall and opened the city to the Medes and Babylonians.

Dissolved. Probably to be taken figuratively, meaning that the palace would be weakened, helpless to offer any substantial resistance to the enemy.

7. Huzzab. The meaning of the Hebrew word thus transliterated is uncertain. Various interpretations have been proposed. Some translate it as a verb, “it is decreed” (ASV).

Others consider it as a noun, “mistress” (RSV). Still others consider it a proper name (see KJV), either that of an Assyrian queen or a name personifying Nineveh itself. The feminine gender is indicated by the Hebrew verb with which it is associated.

Shall lead. Heb. *nahag*. This word also means “to moan,” or “to lament,” which suits the context better here.

Voice of doves. That is, the maids would mourn like doves (see Isa. 38:14; Isa. 59:11; Eze. 7:16).

Tabering. Literally, “drumming,” that is, beating as on a tabret or hand drum (see Vol. III, p. 30). Beating or “drumming” on one’s breasts expressively pictures deep and poignant sorrow (see Luke 18:13; Luke 23:48).

8. Nineveh. The Hebrew of v. 8 is obscure.

9. None end of the store. Greek sources state that the “spoils” of “silver” and “gold” taken from Nineveh were unusually large in quantity and value. It is not surprising that the conquerors should find such rich spoils in the city that had “spoiled” others so often (see 2 Kings 15:19, 20; 16:8, 9, 17, 18; 17:3; 18:14–16; etc.)

10. Empty, and void, and waste. Heb. *buqah umebuqah umebullaqah*. “Desertion, desolation, and destruction” is an attempt to reproduce in English the forceful alliteration in the Hebrew that describes Nineveh’s utter ruin (see on Amos 5:5).

Heart melteth. An expression denoting fear and despair (see Joshua 7:5; Isa. 13:7; Eze. 21:7).

Knees smite. See Dan. 5:6.

Gather blackness. See on Joel 2:6.

11. Dwelling of the lions. In vs. 11, 12 the prophet employs the figure of a lion to describe Assyria’s power (see Jer. 50:17; PK 265; see on Jer. 4:7). He vividly shows how Nineveh, through her conquests, secured spoils “enough” for her people.

13. Against thee. See Nahum 3:5; Jer. 51:25; Eze. 38:3. Nineveh’s destruction came after she had used up her allotted time of probation without coming to a lasting repentance. Divine patience had ceased (see PK 364).

Lord of hosts. For comment see on Jer. 7:3.

Young lions. Here evidently the warriors of the city (see on v. 11).

Messengers. Probably a reference to those who carried the royal orders to civilian and army leaders (see 2 Kings 18:17–19; 19:23).

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

10 GC 641

10, 11 PK 364

CHAPTER 3

The miserable ruin of Nineveh.

1. Bloody city. That is, a place where blood was shed freely and apparently without any qualms of conscience (see Eze. 24:6, 9; Hab. 2:12). The Assyrian monuments abundantly depict how captives were flayed, decapitated, impaled alive, or hanged by hands and feet to die in slow torture. These and other inhuman practices reveal the cruelty of this nation. Their royal inscriptions continually exult over the number of enemies killed, captives carried off, cities razed and plundered, lands wasted, and fruit trees destroyed.

Robbery. Heb. *pereq*, “an act of violence,” denoting the violence of the Assyrians in dealing with conquered peoples. The closing clause of v. 1 indicates that this plundering of its victims by the rulers of Nineveh never ceased (see Isa. 33:1).

2. Noise. The prophet here describes the sounds of the advance of the besieging armies, even as he has already described their outward appearance (ch. 2:3, 4). He hears, as it were, the charioteers’ cracking of whips, the rumble of chariot wheels, the galloping horses, and the leaping forward of the chariots.

3. Multitude. So many were slain that the living warriors “stumble” over them, and are delayed in their progress.

4. Whoredoms. An expression used figuratively of idolatry (see Eze. 23:27; Hosea 1:2; 4:12, 13; Hosea 5:4). Idolatry was another reason for Assyria’s fall. Inasmuch as Assyrian idolatry was grossly immoral, to designate it as “whoredoms” was doubly fitting (see on 2 Kings 9:22).

5. Against thee. See on ch. 2:13.

Lord of hosts. See on Jer. 7:3.

Discover thy skirts. Literally, “uncover thy skirts” (see Isa. 3:17; 47:3; Eze. 16:37; see on Jer. 13:26). Because of Nineveh’s “whoredoms” (see Nahum 3:4) God will punish her most ignominiously, as a harlot.

6. Filth. Heb. *shiqquš*, “a detested thing,” generally used of something connected with idol worship.

A gazingstock. The LXX reads “a public example” (see Matt. 1:19). Continuing the figure of the “harlot” (Nahum 3:4), the prophet foretells that Nineveh would suffer the ignominy and ill-treatment that such a woman might receive from the rabble (see Eze. 16:37–40).

7. Shall flee. A figure indicating the extreme punishment to come upon Nineveh, for the terrible sight would cause the beholder to hasten away.

Who will bemoan her? A rhetorical question indicating that none will feel sorry for her inasmuch as she deserved to be punished (see Jer. 15:5, 6).

8. Populous No. Heb. *No’ ’Amon*, the city of the Egyptian god Amen; that is, the city of Thebes in Upper Egypt (see Jer. 46:25; Eze. 30:14–16). This celebrated city, with its tombs of the kings, its colossi and sphinxes, its great temples of Karnak and Luxor with their massive columns and colonnades, was superbly situated on the Nile, as was Nineveh on the Tigris. Nahum here serves warning to Nineveh that, in the sight of Heaven, she is no better than Thebes and can as easily meet with the same fate. Thebes had been destroyed in 663 B.C. by Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria.

The sea. Here used to refer to the Nile River. In the OT large rivers were sometimes called “seas” (see Isa. 19:5; Jer. 51:36). The closing clause simply means that the Nile with its canals constituted the “wall,” or the defenses, of Thebes.

9. Ethiopia. Or, Cush, mainly the classical Nubia, or the modern Sudan (see on Gen. 10:6). The king who ruled over Egypt at the time of the destruction of Thebes was Tanutamon, the successor and nephew of Taharka, the Biblical Tirhakah. In the OT Tirhakah is called the “king of Ethiopia” (see on 2 Kings 19:9), because he belonged to the Twenty-fifth, or “Ethiopian,” Dynasty of Egypt (see Vol. II, pp. 52, 53).

Egypt. Egypt proper, whose people, joined with the Nubians, constituted a power that was “infinite,” or “without number,” so to speak (2 Chron. 12:3).

Put. Thought by many Egyptologists to refer to Punt, but by Assyriologists to be a part of Libya (see on Eze. 27:10).

Lubim. The Libyans (see on 2 Chron. 12:3).

10. Carried away. The strength of Thebes and her apparently unlimited resources, including the help of her confederates, did not save her from being captured (see on v. 8).

Dashed in pieces. Part of the usual cruel treatment often handed out to conquered cities in ancient times (see 2 Kings 8:12; Ps. 137:9; Isa. 13:16).

11. Thou also. The prophet returns to addressing Nineveh.

Be hid. The meaning here probably is that Nineveh would reveal no power to resist.

13. Women. The hitherto bold, brave Assyrian men would be as “women,” in the sense that they would not be able to resist and defeat the besieging armies (see on Hosea 10:5).

14. Fortify. That is, strengthen places in the fortifications that may be weak. The prophet, speaking with a touch of irony, bids Nineveh do everything possible to prepare for a long, hard siege.

Brickkiln. Literally, “brick mold.”

15. There. In spite of every care taken to strengthen these needful places in the fortifications, “fire” will “devour” the city. Archeology has clearly shown that this prophecy was literally fulfilled.

Cankerworm. Heb. *yeleq*, the creeping, unwinged stage of the locust (see Ps. 105:34; Jer. 51:14, 27; Joel 1:4; 2:25). Evidently the prophet used this figure here and in the following verse to show that the destruction of Nineveh would be as sudden and complete as that wrought on vegetation by these insects.

Make thyself many. Though the Assyrians should assemble armies as numerous as the hordes of cankerworms, or locusts, it would avail them nothing.

16. Thy merchants. Nineveh was advantageously situated to carry on an extensive commerce with other countries. But these trade relationships would be of no avail to her. The destruction effected by her enemies would be swift and complete.

17. Captains. Heb. *taphsarim*, “tablet writers,” or “scribes” (see on Jer. 51:27). The term here used signifies military officers of high rank. These officials are often pictured on the monuments. As locusts become inactive and inert in “cold” weather, so these Assyrian leaders and officials would become powerless in the city’s crisis. The only thing left for the Assyrian army was to “flee away,” that is, to perish and disappear.

18. Shepherds slumber. The leaders of the nation are here represented, either as being asleep to their responsibilities or as being actually killed in battle, “sleeping” the sleep of death.

Scattered. With their leaders gone, the people of Nineveh can no longer offer an effective resistance to their enemies.

19. No healing. Literally, “no lessening,” or “no relief.”

Bruit. Heb. *shema*, “a report” (see Gen. 29:13; Ex. 23:1; Deut. 2:25; etc.). At the news of Nineveh’s downfall, the surrounding nations are pictured as clapping their hands in joy because it will mean the end of Assyria’s ceaseless “wickedness” and relentless oppression. The prophet ends his message on a note of certainty and finality. Assyria has received its day of grace; but now it is useless to offer mercy longer.

ELLEN G. WHITE COMMENTS

1 PK 265
1-5PK 363
19 PK 265
1

¹Nichol, F. D. (1978). *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary : The Holy Bible with exegetical and expository comment*. Commentary Reference Series (Na 1:1). Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association.